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**1962/10/08**

43. Sherman Kent, Memorandum for the Director, "Implications of an Announcement by the President that the US would Conduct Overhead Reconnaissance of Cuba . . .," 8 October 1962

~~YES ONLY~~ ~~S-E-C-R-E-T~~ ~~YES ONLY~~

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

8 October 1962

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BY DCI

Executive Registry

EO 162-8056

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

*Declassified*

SUBJECT: Implications of an Announcement by the President that the US would Conduct Overhead Reconnaissance of Cuba, and of the Actual Reconnaissance Thereafter

NOTE: The following are the conclusions reached by a panel of members of the Board of National Estimates and of the ONE Staff

1. The President's announcement would be vigorously condemned by the Soviets and the Cubans as evincing an intention to commit acts of international aggression.
2. The weight of publicly expressed opinion in the free world would probably condemn the announcement as threatening a marked increase in international tensions. Many Latin Americans would probably look upon it as incompatible with the principle of non-intervention. On the other hand,

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those few which desire the US to take decisive action against Cuba would probably consider the announcement as a disappointingly weak manifestation.

3. The Cubans, or some other country, would probably bring the matter before the UN shortly after the announcement. (They would be virtually certain to do so if a reconnaissance vehicle were shot down.) Having international law on their side, they would hope to achieve a UN condemnation of the US for acts threatening peace. The UN situation would be complicated, and it is possible that in one way or another the US could avert a formal resolution. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that the US would find much support among the assembled nations. It might find itself, for the first time, in virtual isolation.

4. The Soviets and the Cubans would probably be impressed by the evident willingness of the US government to raise still further the level of tension over Cuba, and to commit itself to further risks. We do not believe, however,

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that this would lead to any change in Soviet policy toward Cuba. The USSR would not consider that the US announcement created such a dangerous situation as to require it to reduce its support of Castro. Moreover, it would judge that, in political terms, it could ill afford to make any reduction at such a time. On the other hand, we do not believe that the announcement, or succeeding overflights, would cause the USSR to alter its Cuban policy in a direction which increased the provocation offered to the US, e.g., the provision of medium-range missile bases. In reacting publicly, the Soviets would probably reaffirm their commitment to Cuba's defense, though they would probably not make the commitment more specific or binding.

5. We think it unlikely that the Soviets would retaliate directly with any major moves against the Western position in Berlin. In confronting the Allies with local crises which raise the level of risk in Berlin, they generally prefer to choose a time when US opinion is not highly agitated over other East-West issues. While the announcement would

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create new strains in Soviet-American relations, this effect would not be so strong or so long-lasting as to influence basic Soviet choices with respect to Berlin.

6. The Soviets and Cubans would make every effort to shoot down any reconnaissance vehicle that came over Cuba. If they succeeded in doing so, the tensions would be somewhat increased, though the international political effects of the shootdown would not in themselves be as great as if it had occurred without the prior Presidential announcement. The demonstration of military capability which such an incident would provide would almost certainly impress many Latin Americans.



SHERMAN KENT  
Chairman  
Board of National Estimates

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